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The Return to Religion

The nineteenth century was the century of atheism. But with the arrival of the twentieth century, the whole course of history changed, with religion again becoming a major force in human life. Although more in potential than in reality. The obvious causes are discontent with science and the continuing existence of religion as an inherent part of human nature.

A hundred years ago even thinking against science was considered a sign of ignorance. At the end of the 19th century a well-known scientist said that he was not able to understand anything unless he could make a scientific model of it. But now, at least at the academic level, man's conviction of the usefulness of science has been shaken. The whole spate of books on this subject which came out after the second world war was an indication of the extent of the human dilemma. The article on the history of science in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1984) begins with these words:

'Until recently, the history of science was a story of success. The triumphs of science represented a cumulative process of increasing knowledge and a sequence of victories over ignorance and superstition; and from science flowed a stream of inventions for the improvement of human life. The recent realization of deep moral problems within science of external forces and constraints on its development, and of dangers in uncontrolled technological change has challenged historians to a critical reassessment of this earlier simple faith.' (16:366)

Modern science has offered man innumerable facilities, but along with this it has brought in its wake such great dangers as have rendered all its gifts meaningless. The greatest menace is that of a third world war. In the event of this happening, it will be a nuclear war which will reduce most of the big cities to ruins in a matter of hours. Moreover, the whole atmosphere will be engulfed in thick smoke which will prevent sunlight from reaching the earth. This will in turn produce a terrible nuclear winter, which will bring all human, animal and vegetable existence to the verge of the most tragic annihilation.

One of the most serious problems produced by science is that of air pollution. Science produced technology, which in turn produced machines. Initially, when people saw cars running on the streets and so many items being produced in factories, they were thrilled. But soon they learned the hard reality that all that progress and development had been achieved at the cost of harmful gases pervading the atmosphere rendering it impossible for man to breathe in beneficially. A western thinker has written that the greatest danger facing modern man is air pollution. According to him the human race is advancing towards a future where all humans will find themselves enclosed in a polluted cage produced by the industrial civilization. According to an AP report based on American government statistics: "US

industrial plants are spouting 163 million kg of suspected cancer-causing chemicals into the air annually, with releases from each of the 30 biggest polluters exceeding 450,000 kilograms" (*Times of India*, June 22, 1989).

The Clean Air Act was passed in the U.S.A. in 1970 but after twenty years of this the air pollution has further increased. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. is spending 30 thousand million dollars in controlling air pollution, yet all the present efforts have failed to check the pollution. Now the suggestion is being made to double the amount in order to adopt more effective methods. (*Span*, August, 1989)

The progress of science has not only produced material problems, but has also created intellectual and spiritual problems of a very grave nature.

1. Science and scientific resources had vastly expanded human knowledge. It not only gave man microscopes and telescopes to observe things which had till then remained unseen, but it also opened up innumerable new ways and means of making it possible to add greatly to information in every field.

All this gave man the self-confidence to feel certain that he could arrive at the final reality through science alone. But the only thing that the increase in knowledge has told man is that he has now entered into a new phase of ignorance. In the words of a scientist: "We know more and more about less and less."

By the end of the 19th century scientists believed that with the increase in knowledge they had been heading towards the final reality. But new research by the end of the first half of the 20th century proved that man cannot reach the ultimate reality unaided. His limitations are decisively obstacles in his path. It is now an accepted fact among the scientific community that science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality.

2. With the emergence of modern science it had become fashionable among intellectuals to hold that the Universe could be explained without God. Therefore, every fact that came to light was explained in a way that would prove that there was no mind or consciousness behind the universe. But this bid to explain the universe atheistically failed.

The Indian scientist, Dr Subramaniam Chandrasekhar, who won the Nobel prize in Physics (Jointly) in 1983, is a self-avowed atheist. He has briefly stated the present position of science on this subject:

There are aspects which are extremely difficult to understand. A famous remark of Einstein – and other people have said similar things, Schrodinger in particular – that the most incomprehensible thing about nature is that it is comprehensible. How is it that the human mind, extremely small compared to the universe and living over a time span microscopic in terms of astronomical time, comprehends reality in ideas which spring from the human mind? This question has puzzled many people from Kepler on. Why should mathematical description be accurate? Mathematical description is something the human mind has evolved.

Why should it fit external nature? We don't have answers to these questions. One is not saying the world is orderly and therefore must be ordered. But why should we understand the world in terms of the concepts we have developed? (*The Hindustan Times*, May 31, 1987)

T.S. Eliot has said:

Where is the wisdom that we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge that we have lost in information?

A book called (published in 1989) *Wisdom, Information and Wonder*, by Dr Mary Midgley, elaborates – as its title suggests – on the above rhetorical questions, and makes a significant contribution to the new thinking of the latter half of the 20th century.

In his book, *The Secular City* Professor Harvey R. Cox (published in 1965 in the U.S.A.) showed that people had lost interest in religion. But the same writer in another book titled, *Religion in the Secular City*, published in 1984, has shown that religion in the U.S.A. has seen a revival. The same has been found to be true of the western countries.

God wants the message of His religion to be communicated to all human beings; Islam being the final religion, He has taken special care to safeguard it from all human additions and interpolations. Islam is thus the only totally preserved and genuinely historical of all the religions; as such, it deserves pride of place as the sole reliable guide to pious living.

This attribute of Islam has rendered its communication very easy. If believers in Islam do not, by their own foolishness, create problems unnecessarily, they can continue the work of Islamic *da'wah* without any hindrance. And then, no intellectual hurdles have to be surmounted to understand Islam. That is one of the qualities that has made Islam such an acceptable religion. The only task now is to introduce Islam to people in a purely positive way, so that on their own they will feel attracted to it, and will adopt it in response to their own desires.

The return to religion, in respect of its potential, is a return to Islam. Who will arise to convert this potential to reality? Who will join us in this Plan of God?

Missed opportunities

I once chanced to meet someone who was not particularly old in years, but whose gauntness of face and body suggested that he had become old before time. As he talked, it emerged that his grandfather had been a man of high position and very well-connected. He told me that if he had made use of his grandfather's influence he could really have made something of his life. But, having neglected to do so, he had been a miserable failure. Now his grandfather had departed from this world, and all he could think of was the opportunities he had missed.

This tale of missed opportunities made me think of what was going to happen to people in the life hereafter. It would be the same story, only on a much larger scale. There are opportunities for the people of this world today, which if exploited, would enable them to build a bright future in the world to come. These opportunities keep presenting themselves right throughout the human lifespan till the very moment of demise. But, how tragic it is that, today, everyone is so engrossed in material things instead of in spiritual matters, that they lose the most precious of opportunities to secure the divine riches God intended for them in the life to come.

It is only when man reaches the world of the Hereafter that he realizes what it means to be bereft of everything. It is only then that he appreciates what opportunities he has missed, what makes it all the more grave is that these opportunities recur only during a man's lifetime, and not in the hereafter. Then it is too late for him to go in search of his "missed opportunities."

This is a matter which should be given serious consideration, because a loss in the context of this world is only temporary, while a loss in the Hereafter will be eternal.

Opportunities for action are here today, gone tomorrow, Tomorrow one will reap as one has sown. This is undoubtedly the most serious of life's realities. But it is this very reality of which man is most oblivious.

7 September-October 1995

WOMAN BETWEEN ISLAM AND WESTERN SOCIETY

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The status of woman in Islam is the same as that of man. Injunctions about honour and respect enjoined for one sex are enjoined equally for the other sex. So far as rights in this world and rewards in the Hereafter are concerned, there is no difference between the sexes. In the organization of daily living, both are equal participants and partners. Yet Islam sees man as man and woman as woman and, considering the natural differences, it advocates the principle of the division of labour between the two sexes rather than the equality of labour.

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Social Aspect of Islamic Mysticism

Mysticism is generally called *tasawwuf* in India and *irfan* (realization) in Iran. To me *irfan* is the most appropriate word, for mysticism, in actual fact, is another name for the realization of inner reality.

The word mysticism has been variously defined in academic works. By way of a simple definition, it means to penetrate one's inner soul and to enable it, by developing it, to establish contact with God, the Greater Soul.

This process purifies the human personality, and the soul comes to realize itself. The latent natural potential of the soul is ultimately awakened; in the words of the Quran, it becomes the serene (89:27) or pure soul (87:14).

It is but natural that the personality developed by the mystic (or the *Aarif*) in this way does not remain enclosed within a boundary. His inner state also having its external manifestation, his personality finds expression in his social relations.

One who has realized himself will, at the same time, place a higher spiritual value on other human beings too. One whose heart is filled with God's love, will necessarily be filled with the love of human beings – the creatures of God. One who respects the Higher Reality will surely respect other human beings. It is this aspect of mysticism which I have called its social aspect.

A Persian mystic poet has expressed the mystic code of behaviour in these most beautiful words:

“The stories of kings like Alexander and Dara hold no interest for us. Ask us only about love and faithfulness.”

Another mystic poet has this to say:

“The comforts of both the worlds are hidden in these two things: Being kind to friends and according better treatment to foes.”

When a sufi or mystic is engrossed in the love of God, he rises above the mundane world and discovers the higher realities. He becomes such a human being as has no ill-feelings for anyone. In fact, he cannot afford hatred, as hatred would nullify his very spirituality. He cannot divest himself of feelings of love as this would amount to divesting himself of all delicate feelings.

Islam is the answer to the demands of nature, It is in fact a counterpart of human nature. This is why Islam has been called a religion of nature in the Qur'an and Hadith.

A man once came to the Prophet Muhammad and asked him what he should do in a certain matter. The Prophet replied, 'Consult your conscience (heart) about it.' By the conscience the Prophet meant his

inner feelings. That is, what one's conscience tells one would likewise be what Islam would demand of one as a matter of common sense.

What does human nature desire more than anything? It desires, above all, peace and love. Every human being wants to live in peace and to receive love from the people around him. Peace and love are the religion of human nature as well as what Islam demands of us. The Qur'an tells us, "... and God calls you to the home of peace" (10:25).

One of the teachings of Islam is that when two or more people meet, they must greet one another with the words, 'Assalamu-Alaikum' (may peace be upon you). Similarly, *Salat*, or prayer, said five times daily is the highest form of worship in Islam. At the close of each prayer all worshippers have to turn their faces to either side and utter the words 'Assalamu-Alaikum' *wa rahmatullah* (May peace and God's blessing be upon you). This is like a pledge given to people: 'O people, you are safe from me. Your life, your property, your honour is secure with me.'

This sums up the spirit of true religion, the goal of which is spiritual uplift. It is the ultimate state of this spiritual uplift which is referred to in the Qur'an as the "serene soul" (89:27).

Thus a true and perfect man, from the Islamic point of view, is one who has reached that level of spiritual development where peace and peace alone prevails. When a person has attained that peaceful state, others will receive from him nothing less than peace. He may be likened to a flower which can send out only its fragrance to man, it being impossible for it to emit an unpleasant smell.

An incident relating to a Muslim saint very aptly illustrates the spirit of the mystic individual. The story goes that once a Muslim sufi was travelling along with his disciples. During the journey he encamped near a large grove of trees upon which doves used to perch.

During this halt one of the sufi's disciples aimed at one of the doves, killed it, cooked it, then ate it. Afterwards something strange happened. A flock of doves came to the tree under which the sufi was resting and began hovering over it and making a noise.

The Muslim sufi, communicating with the leader of the birds, asked them what was the matter with them and why they were protesting. The leader replied, 'We have a complaint to make against you, that is, one of your disciples has killed one of us.' Then the Muslim sufi called the disciple in question and asked him about it. He said that he had not done anything wrong, as the birds were their foodstuff. He was hungry, so he killed one for food. He thought that in so doing he had not done anything wrong. The sufi then conveyed this reply to the leader of the doves.

The leader replied: "Perhaps you have failed to understand our point. Actually what we are complaining about is that all of you came here in the garb of sufis, yet acted as hunters. Had you come here in hunter's garb, we would certainly have remained on the alert. When we saw you in the guise of sufis, we thought that we were safe with you and remained perched on the top of the tree without being properly vigilant."

This anecdote very aptly illustrates the reality of a true mystic or spiritual person. One who has reached an advanced stage of spiritual uplift, having found the true essence of religion, no longer has the will or the capacity to do harm. He gives life not death, to others. He benefits others, doing injury to no one. In short, he lives among the people like flowers and not like thorns. He has nothing but love in his heart to bestow upon others.

There is another interesting story which illustrates this point very well. This is related to Sheikh Nizamuddin Aulia, a Muslim Sufi of the 13th century. He lies buried in New Delhi, the area is named 'Hazrat Nizamuddin' after him. Fortunately I am also a neighbour of this great Muslim sufi.

The story goes that once a disciple of Sheikh visited him. He offered him a gift of a pair of scissors, a product of his hometown. When the Sheikh saw this gift, he remarked politely:

'What am I to do with this gift. It would have been better if you had brought me a needle and thread. Scissors cut things apart while a needle and thread join things together. You know my job is to unite people, and not to separate them.

Islamic mysticism elevates people. It makes them think spiritually rather than materially. This spiritual elevation generates tolerance. People feel good about forgiving others. They eschew taking revenge. They return love for hatred. This kind of temperament is bound to establish peace and mutual respect. In this way, Islamic mysticism, in the practical sense, is the key to a good and peaceful society.

Now I should like to say a few words about prayer and meditation. Let me begin with a quotation from the Qur'an:

"When My servants question you about Me, tell them that I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls to Me; therefore, let them answer My call and put their trust in Me, that they may be rightly guided (2:186).

This verse of the Qur'an tells us that, in Islam, there is no need for any intermediary to establish contact between God and man. At any time and place man can contact God directly. The only condition is that man should turn to God with sincere devotion.

Islam believes in a personal God. God is an alive being, fully aware of His servants. He hears and sees. That being so, man must call upon God in all personal matters. Whenever he calls upon God with a sincere heart, he will find Him close by.

Meditation in Islam aims at bringing man closer to God. When man worships God, when he remembers Him, when his heart is turned towards Him with full concentration, when he makes a request or a plea, then he establishes a rapport with his Maker. In the words of the Hadith, at that particular moment he comes to whisper with his Lord. He has the tangible feeling that he is pouring his heart out to God and that God in turn is answering his call.

When this communion is established between God and man, man can feel himself becoming imbued with a special kind of peace. His eyes are moist with tears. He starts receiving inspiration from God. It is in moments such as these that man can rest assured of his prayers being granted by God.

According to a *hadith* the Prophet Muhammad said the highest form of worship is to pray as if you were seeing God. We learn from this *hadith* the true sign of a superior form of worship. The true sign is for man to sense the presence of God during worship, and feel that he has come close to God. That is when he can experience the refreshing, cooling effect of God's love and blessings for man. It is this feeling of closeness to God which is the highest form of spiritual experience.

Tolerance!! Its Significance Today

On January 1st, 1995, the newspaper flashed the news that “the United Nations has proclaimed 1995 as the “Year of Tolerance,” saying that the ability to be tolerant of the actions, beliefs and opinions of others is a major factor in promoting world peace. Amidst the resurgence of ethnic conflicts, discrimination against minorities and xenophobia directed against refugees and asylum-seekers, tolerance is the only way forward, said the statement of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO). It is said, racism and religious fanaticism in many countries had led to many forms of discrimination and the intimidation of those who held contrary views. Violence against and intimidation of authors, journalists and others who exercise their freedom of expression, were also on the increase along with political movements which seek to make particular groups responsible for social ills such as crime and unemployment. Intolerance is one of the greatest challenges we face on the threshold to the 21st century said the UNESCO Statement. Intolerance is both an ethnic and political problem. It is a rejection of the differences between individuals and between cultures. When intolerance becomes organised or institutionalised, it destroys democratic principles and poses a threat to world Peace. – *The Hindustan Times*, January 1, 1995.

This proclamation of the U.N. is most apt and timely. The prime need of the world today is indeed tolerance.

One of the stark realities of life is that divergence of views does exist between man and man, and that it impinges at all levels. Be it at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country, differences are bound to exist everywhere. Now the question is how best unity can be forged or harmony brought about in the face of human differences.

Some people hold that the removal of all differences is the sine qua-non for bringing about unity. But, this view is untenable, as it is not practicable. You may not like the thorns which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for you to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bull-dozer over all rosebushes, new plants will grow in their place which will bear roses ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Similarly, a peaceful society can be created only by creating and fostering the spirit of tolerance towards diversities. In this world, unity is achievable only by learning to unite in spite of differences, rather than insisting on unity without differences. For total eradication of differences is an impossibility. The secret of attaining peace in life is tolerance of disturbance of the peace.

There is nothing wrong in diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality which has many advantages. The beauty of the garden of life is enhanced if the flower of unity is accompanied by the thorn of diversity.

An advantage flowing from this attitude is that it builds character. If you are well-mannered towards those whose views are similar to yours, you may be said to exhibit fairly good character. But, if you behave properly with those holding divergent views from you or who criticize you, then you deserve to be credited with having an excellent character.

In the same way, a society whose members hold identical views and never have any controversial discussions, will soon find itself in the doldrums. The intellectual development of the members of this society will be frozen, because personal evolution takes place only where there is interaction of divergent thinking. So where there is no such interaction, how can there be intellectual development?

The adoption of a policy of tolerance in the face of controversy and opposition is not a negative step. It is undoubtedly a positive course of action.

Divergence of views plays an important role in the development of the human psyche. It is only after running the intellectual gauntlet that a developed personality emerges. If in a human society, this process ceases to operate, the development of character will come to a standstill.

Nobody in this world is perfect. If a man is endowed with some good qualities, he may be lacking others. This is one of the reasons why differences crop up among people. But, for life as a whole, these differences are actually a great blessing: the good points of one man may compensate for the shortcomings of another, just as one set of talents in one man may complement a different set in another. If people could only learn to tolerate others' differences, their very forbearance would become a great enabling factor in collective human development.

After 1947, when the first Government of Independent India was formed, two important leaders were included in it. One was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the other was Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. Pandit Nehru's westernized ideas were in great contrast to the orientalism of Sardar Patel. And this caused frequent differences of opinion between these two leaders. But this proved to be a boon for the nation, because with Pandit Nehru's abilities compensating for the shortcomings of Sardar Patel, and vice versa. The end result was one of an efficacious complementarity. The above is a good example of the difference between the respective natures and opinions of individuals essential for human development in general.

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. When negatively affected by another's unpalatable behaviour, your mental equilibrium is upset. On the other hand, emotionally untouched by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment, you will continue to perform your work in the normal way. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances your efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it.

Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

The Qur'an's Lament

(Mahirul Qadri)

*They lift me to their eyes, then consign me to a niche
Or frame me in a locket; or rinse me for a potion
A satchel of silk and brocade,
And soaked in perfume becomes my cell
And as if by parrots and mynahs trained to talk
My words are intoned in mere recitation.
When disputes arise and a solemn oath is sworn,
They need me, so take me out.
There's no assembly without my recitation.
But hearts remain cold and eyes stay dry
Lies out strip touch and evil beats good
And for each smile I yield uncounted tears.
They claim faith in me while obeying alien codes
So to harass, and revile me too.
Though all festive gatherings are open to me
I am there only as the sole victim.*

The News of the Last Day

A high-intensity earthquake lasting 45 seconds and epicentred at Almora, U.P., rocked northern India at a quarter to twelve, midnight, on October 20, 1991. With the same jolts, which could be felt even as far away as Delhi, hundreds of houses collapsed, about a thousand people were killed and more than three thousand were injured.

Although so devastating in its effects, in comparison with that supreme, world-shaking event, the qiamah (the Day of Resurrection) an earthquake is but a very minor affair. Nevertheless, it gives us an idea of what will happen on that day on a much vaster scale. *The Times of India* of October 21, 1991, reported an incident which took place on that very night which provides a telling parallel. It seems that at 2.30 a.m. just ten minutes before the earthquake began, certain Punjab militants opened fire on the Sirsa (District Bareilly) police station with AK -47 rifles, where the few police personnel on duty at that time were ill-equipped for effective defence.

However, the militants had not reckoned with the forces of nature. Instead of just dealing with a small police chowky, they now found themselves battling with a vastly superior enemy. Like all the other people in the vicinity they fled in terror, no doubt thinking that the heavens were falling on them.

The helplessness experienced in the face of an earthquake is nothing compared to the state of desperation man will be reduced to on the Qiamah. Then he will be confronted with the biggest imaginable earthquake, and will be powerless to control it.

When possessed with power, man tends to become haughty and over-confident. But when the earth is so shaken that the mountains come tumbling down and it is engulfed by the mighty waves of the ocean, he will flee in utter bewilderment, leaving all his possessions behind him. To his horror, he will find that there is no escape route whatsoever.

How War became Obsolete

As the industrialised world celebrates 50 years of peace against the backdrop of global security and co-operation in an area extending from Vancouver to Vladivostock, the end of the Clausewitzian era seems to have been largely ignored. The German strategist, Karl von Clausewitz, a contemporary of Napoleon, formulated the political axiom which governed the world for more than a century and half that war was a continuation of politics by other means. Nation states had customarily employed war as a decisive instrument in international politics. When von Clausewitz formulated his aphorism, war was conducted by armies of nations in a battlefield generally outside inhabited areas and there were few non-combatant casualties and little collateral damage to property. With innovations in destructive technologies, all these changed. Improvements in communication and transportation facilities made it possible to field hundreds of thousands of soldiers in combat resulting in continuous fighting across the entire territory of the country under attack. Civilian non-combatant casualties started increasing and collateral property damage became unavoidable. In World War I civilian casualties almost equalled those among combatants. These increased with the advent of aircraft with the capability of penetrating deep into enemy territory and dropping bombs. It was argued that since industry supported the war effort, workers produced war materials, roads and railways transported them and power stations supplied energy, all these were legitimate targets for destruction by aerial bombing. In reality, it amounted to the systematic killing of non-combatant civilians and the destruction of both industrial and residential property. In the World War II, the non-combatant casualties far exceeded the combatant ones with two thirds of those killed and wounded in the war being civilians. This legitimisation of such bombings logically culminated in the use of nuclear weapons. One bomb achieved what a thousand bombing raids on cities could.

ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE

In the post World War II period, the lethality of weapons increased and so did their ranges. The ratio of non-combatant to combatant casualties rose to a staggering 20-to-one in the Vietnam war. There was also deliberate ecological damage caused by the use of chemical defoliants. In spite of all the claims about the accuracy of the bombing in the Gulf war there appears little doubt that civilian casualties exceeded combatant losses many times over.

Today high-intensity conventional war in the industrial world will not only *result* in enormous civilian casualties and collateral damage to property, but will also lead to an ecological catastrophe. Oil installations, chemical plants and even buildings incorporating a lot of synthetic materials when hit will produce enormous quantities of pyridoxines. A limited demonstration of this was provided by the Iraqis who set fire to the Kuwaiti oil fields. Water sources are also likely to be contaminated.

Up to World War II, an occupying power was able to extract economic benefits for itself from the occupied country and make the population of the invaded nation work for its benefit. The exceptions were the Soviet Union, parts of Yugoslavia and Poland. Today Vietnam, Afghanistan, the West Bank and anti-colonial wars prove that keeping under occupation a hostile population is far more expensive than invading a country. It is under these circumstances that during the visit of former Soviet President Mr. Michael Gorbachov to West Germany, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and he made a joint declaration that war was no longer a viable instrument of policy. It is significant that the statement was made in Germany from where von Clausewitz came. Earlier President Ronald Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev had declared that a nuclear war could not be won and, therefore, must not be initiated.

PITH AND SUBSTANCE

War was a continuation of politics, an instrument of policy and was meant to be resorted to in the expectation of gain, or to limit the damage otherwise possible by raising the cost to the aggressor. That was the pith and substance of the Clausewitzian theory. War does not make sense as an instrument of policy, if there is no worthwhile gain or the costs of it will not be commensurate to the results expected or achieved. In the 19th century and till the mid-20th century, when the age of colonialism ended, the riches and status of nations in the international hierarchy were popularly deemed to be linked with the area under their control: the mineral wealth, the territories, the number of subjects in the empires and the industrialization of metropolitan countries. Today Japan and Germany have proved that the ranking in the hierarchy of nations largely depends upon the skills of populations, their work ethic and the extent of value addition the work force can make to the goods and services they produce.

Colonialism has come to an end and it is no longer possible for imperial powers to deny the raw materials which their colonial domains had to their rivals - a reason why Germany and Japan wanted to acquire empires on the model of Britain and France. Almost all the raw materials are available in the market. Today industrialised nations carefully calculate the costs and benefits of intervention. Legislatures ask whether their young men and women should be exposed to risk to establish peace in Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda and elsewhere. The philosophy of the white man's burden is dead. Unfortunately these considerations which are valid for established and industrialised nation states do not extend to the developing world where the nation state formation is still underway.

MANY CASES

In the developing world, civil strife occurs on account of ethno-nationalist factors. Unfortunately, unlike in the industrialised world where the advances in weapon technology and rise in political consciousness had some correlation, in the developing world today sophisticated high technology weapons are available to populations and organised groups who are still to evolve in terms of political values. Tribes steeped in clannish culture and values have Kalashnikovs, rocket-propelled grenades and explosives. So do fanatical

sectarian organisations and terrorist groups. Most such equipment originates from industrialised nations and relatively advanced developing nations. There are a number of cases where large populations with separate ethno-nationalist identities are fighting for their legitimate demands for greater autonomy and democratic rights.

In numerous other instances, extremist values have inspired large-scale violence. Such conflicts are not always wars in the sense in which Clausewitz defined them. They are often insurgencies and large-scale terrorism where at least on one side the normal calculations of costs and benefits of war as part of political intercourse do not apply. Very often it is not possible to identify a single aggressor who is in a position to negotiate and terminate the hostilities.

Today in the industrialised world where the Clausewitzian maxim originated, the era of war as a continuation of politics has come to an end though it is still possible that many national leaderships have not recognised this reality. There is always a time-lag between reality and its cognition by politico-military establishments. That was the reason why bloody anti-colonial wars occurred in Indonesia, Vietnam, Algeria, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Most military leaders have declared that nuclear weapons are unusable in wars, yet the leaderships of five nuclear weapon powers still insist on having them. Though it may take time for politico-military establishments to realise this and come to terms with it, the era of Clausewitz has come to an end at least in the industrialised world, and even in respect of relatively advanced developing nations.

(By K. Subrahmanyam, *The Times of India*, May 9, 1995)

(214:4:5)

The Concept of God

We have the entire universe before us. We see it, we experience it, and so are forced to believe in its existence. Even when a man rejects the godhead, he still believes in the universe. But when and how did it come into being? Explaining its existence as the creation of God is no final answer – so it is generally held – since the very next question which arises is if God made the universe, then who made God?

Can we believe in a causeless universe and a causeless God? Belief in a causeless God as the Creator of all things has more logic to it, in this world of cause and effect, than belief in a causeless universe and a non-existent God. It is by believing in a causeless Creator that we save ourselves from believing in the impossibility of a causeless universe.

Belief in God seems to many to be a very strange thing. But disbelief is even stranger. Sometimes it is argued that belief must rest on proof. But, from the purely scientific standpoint, nothing in this world can be proved or disproved. So far as believing in anything is concerned, the option is not between the proved and the unproved, but between the workable and the non-workable.

For instance, scientists in general believe in the concept of gravity. They do so, not because of proof of its existence, but because of the demonstrable predictability of effects. They do not know why gravity has the effect it has, or how it came into existence. They simply accept its existence as a useful theory.

This is the case with all scientific concepts, and belief in them does not mean uncritical acceptance of established as opposed to unestablished ideas. It simply means believing in a working hypothesis as opposed to an unworkable theory. Exactly the same principle is applicable to the concept of God.

In the matter of gravity, the choice for us is not between matter with gravity and matter without gravity, but between matter with gravity and non-existence matter. Since the concept of non-existent matter is untenable, because unworkable, we have opted for matter with gravity. From the purely academic angle, the same is true of the concept of God.

The universe itself does not have the ability to create. It can neither increase nor decrease itself by so much as a particle. As with all other scientific concepts, we must choose not between the universe with God and the universe without God, but between God and a non-existent universe. Since a nonexistent universe is inconceivable, we must perforce opt for the concept of the universe with God.

(195:12)

The Problems of Riots

A regular reader of Al-Risala, Mr. M. Sajid of Delhi, once told me in the course of conversation that he agreed with all of the viewpoints expressed in al-Risala, except for one, and that was holding the Muslims responsible for riots that took place from time to time. He balked at the idea that Muslims started riots. He felt that this ran counter to the facts.

I explained to him that he must have misconstrued my words. What I actually said was that *Muslims were responsible for not preventing riots from taking place*. In the context of dealing with opponents, the Qur'an says: "If you persevere and guard yourself against evil, their machinations will never harm you" (3:120).

That is, if you remain patient and adopt a God-fearing attitude, the plots of your opponents cannot harm you in any way. This verse tells us that the actual problem is not the existence of plots, but the absence of patience and piety: if riots occur, it is not because of hostile conspiracies, but because of our inability to adopt the path of patience and piety in countering them.

I further explained to him that whether these problems pertained to India or to any other country, there would always be people who indulged in activities which injured others' sentiments. The solution to this problem is not to stop others from indulging in such activities, but to control one's own feelings. Wherever Muslims have fallen a prey to provocation, their reaction has caused matters to escalate into full-scale riots. But where they have adopted the path of patience and avoidance, rioting has been nipped in the bud.

We must fully grasp the fact that the administration is unable to prevent the outbreak of rioting. If riots are to be prevented, it will only be by right action on the part of the Muslims. The only viable strategy for Muslims to adopt is to remain unruffled in the face of provocation, and to exercise patience in the face of unpleasantness. And there is nothing to prevent their seeking police assistance whenever a situation is about to take an ugly turn. This is something which needs to be done at the very outset. If Muslims can accept that this should be their role, the phenomenon of rioting could be banished, once and for all, from this country.

Human Tragedy

The reality of life is sadly reflected in one of the sayings of the Jewish leader, Abba Eban (b. 1915). "Men and nations do the sensible thing only after they have exhausted all other options." (*Liberty's Nation*)

It is true that no individual or group seems willing to act seriously or sensibly unless and until all irrational and superficial options have failed.

Our world is marred by injustice and dishonesty and all kinds of atrocities at both the individual as well as the communal level. This is because people feel free to do as they please quite unfettered by moral considerations. The wrongdoers renounce such ways only when there is no other option. The freedom – which they abuse – has been given to mankind, because our world is a testing place. And on Doomsday, all without exception will be called to account for how they have used the freedom. If they have ignored and denied the truth in this world, they shall be obliged to accept it on the Day of Reckoning, because all of their options will have run out and subterfuge and pleas for mercy will be of no avail; by that time it will be too late either to beg for forgiveness or to attempt to make amends.

Why do people wait until they are forced to submit to the truth? If one accepts the truth because one is forced to, one's acceptance has no value. Why again do people wait until they are forced to treat others with justice? Being just to others because one is forced to is likewise an action bereft of honour or human kindness.

Why wait until we are on the brink of Doomsday before we act with human concern for individuals and a proper respect for society? Why wait until the Day of Judgement before we act as bidden in the Qur'an, as honest, upright, responsible individuals?

Towards Reconstruction

In his book 'Victory without War', former American President Richard Nixon (1913-), commenting on the scene in India, made this observation: "Those who believe India is not governed well should remember how miraculous it is that India is governed at all."

Richard Nixon's remark on the Indian social set-up is no doubt harsh. We would be wise, however, to take this as a challenge rather than just simmer with resentment over it. Instead of venting our anger on Nixon as an unfair critic, we would be well-advised to devote our entire attention to the internal construction of our country. We must struggle to raise our country so high that never again will any Nixon dare pass such remarks against us. Japan could be our model in this matter. At the end of the second world war Japan had reduced itself to insignificance in the eyes of the world. But after a hard struggle lasting forty years it eventually raised itself to such heights that no one now dare cast aspersions on it.

The need of the hour is to give fresh thought to our national problems. Then, without the slightest delay, we must begin our journey in the right direction so that our future may be better and brighter as compared to our present.

A senior Indian journalist, S. Mulgaokar, has made some very penetrating observations on the Indian situation in his article entitled 'Can systemic changes provide the entire answer?' (Published in two installments in the *Indian Express* of February 7 and 14, 1987).

He pointed out that forty years had passed since we gained our freedom. We had made progress too in many fields, but our problems were many and serious, and on balance, appeared to outweigh the progress we had made.

Mr. Mulgaokar did not subscribe to the views of those who talked of a change in the system. To him, 'in the final analysis, a system is only as good as those who operate it.'

I entirely agree with Mr. Mulgaokar on this point. I would like to add that it was Mahatma Gandhi who gave our country its political base. Later, when power came into the hands of Pandit Nehru, he gave the country its industrial base.

Now the third urgent task is to provide the country with a moral base. To me, this third base – the moral base – will be the decisive factor in the course which our national life will take. This is a reality admitted by almost every right-thinking person.

(203:14)

The Exploitation of Islam

A *Time* magazine report of February 15, 1993 carrying pictures of Indian Muslims, states that persecution of Indian Muslims by Hindus is due to the latter's hatred for the Muslims on religious grounds. It says:

Hindu hatred for Muslims dates back to the 10th century, when Muslim invaders first began looting the subcontinent and destroying Hindu temples (p. 25).

The Muslim invaders, the targets of blame over a long period of time, found a powerful defence in the superbly written works of Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857-1914). Popular in British India, his writings set the subsequent trend and Muslim writers and speakers followed in his footsteps. All, without exception, began to defend the Muslim kings.

This style of defence was greatly to the Muslims' liking, but did little to bring about a change in the Hindu mind. On the contrary, there was a hardening of Hindu attitudes which in terms of religious antipathy, reached its culminating point in the twentieth century. Shibli's approach had clearly been counter-productive. That was because his writings, which should have aimed at putting an end to Hindu hatred, were more calculated to win applause from fellow Muslims.

Now, the need of the hour is for Muslims to change their entire attitude. Rather than defend the Muslim kings, they should admit their mistakes and distance themselves from their wrongdoing. That is, they should cease to associate themselves from any of their deeds which were not carried out in the true spirit of Islam.

Along with our assertion that Islam is the religion of truth, we must also concede the Muslims are quite a different matter. Today, there are many Muslims who exploit their religion for their own personal interests – as indeed happened in the past. Right-thinking Muslims in general should now refuse – be they kings or commoners – to have anything to do with the unIslamic acts of their forebears.

Fasting and Qur'an

The Qur'an makes special mention of its revelation in the month of Ramadan, while making it obligatory upon the followers. This indicates that there is a close link between Ramadan and the Qur'an. In the words of the Qur'an:

In the month of Ramadan the Qur'an was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore whoever of you is present in that month let him fast. But he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on.
(2:185)

The revelation of Qur'an started in 610 AD in the month of Ramadan according to the lunar calendar. The first revelation was made to the Prophet when he was in the cave of Hira, and it continued for the next 23 years, finally reaching completion in Medina.

The guidance given in the Qur'an is the best blessing to the mankind from God, because it shows man the path to ultimate success. It tells man how to conduct himself so that in his eternal life he can gain entry into paradise. Paradise is the goal of man. Fasting is the path to it.

The month of Ramadan is the annual reminder of this blessing. The celebration of the revelation of the Qur'an is not observed in the usual way but by abstinence and being thankful to the Almighty. Fasting in this month is acknowledgment of the divine blessings. It is like saying, 'O Lord I have heard and I accept it.'

Also this is a month during which the Qur'an should be read and understood. The Qur'an is specially recited in this month. In the night the Qur'an is also recited during *Tarawih*. This month has been made special so that the blessings of God may be counted even more.

When the Qur'an is read during the month of its revelation, it reminds us of the time when the divine light from heaven fell upon the earth. Man remembers this and cries out, 'O Lord, fill my heart with your divine light!' He cries out, 'Make me among those who are near you!' When he reads about Hell and Paradise, his inner self cries out, 'O Lord, save me from Hell, and let me enter Paradise.'

In this way the Qur'an becomes a guiding force in man's life. He earns his livelihood according to its dictates. He bathes in the ocean of its life to cleanse his soul.

The Qur'an is a reward to His servants from God. And fasting is acknowledgment of the reward. Through fasting man makes himself worthy of being thankful to God. He obeys the command of God and thus revels in the supremacy of God. Having gone through a month's fasting, he creates an ability in himself to lead a life of piety as ordained in the Qur'an.

Fasting is a special deed. It makes a man kind-hearted, and enables him to awaken his finer feelings. He is then able to feel and experience what God desires of a man in this world.

Fasting, a form of training to create the capacity in a man to become the most devoted worshipper, makes him most grateful to God and creates a fear of Him which makes him shiver. The very hardship of fasting carries a man from the material world to the plain of spirituality.

The Construction of the Mind

One of the important point made in the UNESCO 'constitution is as follows:

“Since war began in the minds of men it is in the mind that the defence of peace must be constructed,”

This is an indisputable fact. Whether the quarrel is between two people on the street, or between groups or nations, the origin of all such incidents lies in the mind. It is in the mind that feelings of hatred, revenge and anger are produced, and when these spill over into provocation, the result is some measure of conflict, ranging from petty squabbling to full-scale war.

Largely speaking, negative thoughts arise in reaction to untoward behaviour on the part of others. Someone insults us and we become angry. An unpleasant situation is created – unnecessarily, we think by someone, and we are provoked by this. Someone damages our prestige and we therefore seek revenge. All these vengeful impulses take shape first of all in our minds and when they are externalized, they wreak havoc. If peace could be established at the level of the mind, before there is any physical escalation of strife, the world would be a much better place to live in.

The only effective way to prevent quarrels, whether at the individual or at the national or international level, is to train people's minds: patience should be emphasized as the greatest of all virtues.

Such a mentality can be developed only if negative thinking is replaced by positive thinking. This should be directed at resistance to provocation and the avoidance of all unpleasantness and consequent entanglements. It must provide the basis for cool and unemotional decision-making, and, above all, for return of love for hatred.

Such a reform of the mind would lead to the most positive reconstruction of human affairs ever witnessed in human history.

Wisdom should go hand in hand with bravery

Khalid ibn Walid was one of the greatest warriors and leaders of the Muslim army in its early days. Yet, in the year 17 A.H., while he was still riding high after his mighty conquests, he was removed from his post by the second Caliph Umar. Khalid was a brave and extremely daring commander. But there were times when his bravery would lead him into hasty decisions. A case in point was siege of Hims, (16 A.H.) when the Roman Emperor Heraclius, along with his North African troops, attacked the forces of Khalid and besieged them within the town. Contrary to orders from the Caliphate, Khalid immediately sallied forth to do battle with the attacking forces, without waiting for the arrival of reinforcements. On this particular occasion, the Muslims, by the sheer grace of God, were victorious. But Umar considered that Khalid had been hasty and imprudent in his action. Shah Waliullah comments:

“Courage is not everything in the field of battle. Patience to await the necessary assistance is also a virtue, otherwise courage, on its own, can lead one straight to defeat.”

(Shah Waliullah, *Izala al-Khafa*)

A Purposeful creation

Why was this world made? Why was man born into this world? Why, after a certain period of time, does he pass away? What will happen after death? These are the most important questions concerning the origins and fate of mankind, and they should never be far from people's minds. Finding the correct answers to these questions has always been one of man's most important quests.

Pondered over for thousands of years, these questions have been variously answered by different people. However, these answers can be placed in two broad categories: one, which holds the great array of wonders in this world to be purposeless, and the other, which asserts that man was created with a purpose and that he has a definite goal.

While the first view tends to be subscribed to by poets, philosophers and secular scholars, the second view is firmly upheld by that very special class of beings called prophets, or messengers of God. The most authentic testament to the second view has been provided by the Prophet Muhammad.

Many arguments can be put forward in support of the answers in both of these categories. It is very obvious, however, that the notion of purposelessness is not in keeping with the structure of life and universe. The idea, on the other hand, of purposeful creation, falls exactly into place, for the simple reason that it contains no inherent contradictions.

The world into which man is born is fraught with significance. There is nothing which is of a meaningless or random nature. It is quite unthinkable that man, with his meaningful life, born into a meaningful universe, should find no purpose in creation. Where there is meaningfulness, there will, of necessity, be purposefulness. This aspect of the universe is a clear verification of the Prophet's answer.